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## WHAT TIME IS IT?

by JAMES DAANE

WITH an expression of profound seriousness on his face, a minister began his sermon one Sunday morning with the question, "What time is it?" This dramatic gesture was sustained by a long pause. The congregation, being children of the western world, interested more in redeeming the time than in philosophizing about it, became uneasy. To relieve the congregation and to enlighten the minister, an elder arose to his feet and prosaically announced that it was ten o'clock.

### On Telling Time

THIS was surely a *very* prosaic answer to so profound a question. The answer was indeed accurate. Yet it was, nevertheless, very commonplace. It is generally acknowledged that it is ten o'clock every day — in fact the truth is so common that no one bothers to acknowledge it. This answer, which could be made with accuracy every day — and every night — was therefore, very prosaic.

But the minister's question was a profound one. If the elder had declared that it was Sunday, the people might indeed have laughed a bit, but the answer would have been much more profound than the one he gave — especially if he really knew the meaning of Sunday. But even so his answer would still have been commonplace. For like "ten o'clock," "Sunday" is quite common — it comes every week. Every seven days there is the "time" of which it can be said, accurately — and prosaically — "It is Sunday."

Had the elder answered that it was "1951," his answer would have shown increased depth, but it would still have lacked the profundity demanded by the question. For there was a time once before when it was 1951 — B.C.

If the elder had had in mind the deep thought about time reflected in the face of the minister, he would have arisen and announced that it was 1951 A.D., nineteen hundred and fifty-one years after the life and death of Jesus Christ. This answer, chronologically speaking, would have been somewhat less accurate than the one he gave, but it would have been profoundly more significant. For the question, "What time is it?" can only be answered significantly by reference to Jesus Christ.

### Christ and Time

MEN do not commonly think of Jesus Christ when they wonder about the time. They more commonly look at their watches or wall-clock. Although

the clock cannot decisively and significantly answer this question, even Christians are more clock-conscious than Christ-conscious. How can there be anything decisively significant about "ten o'clock," when that time comes around every day and every night? If "ten o'clock" were a decisively significant time, it would not have to happen twice daily. For the decisively significant thing, for example, the Cross, can happen only *once*. Even though Christians themselves are more clock-conscious than Christ-conscious, the endless repetition of "ten o'clock" indicates that it has, in the Christian sense, no decisive significance.

The decisive time happens only once, and cannot be altered — precisely because it is decisive. The insignificance of clock-time from a distinctively Christian point of view is also indicated by the fact that clock-time can be altered. The clock can be pushed back or forward, as for example, in the interest of Daylight Saving Time. On such a day,

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clock time is "changed" and "ten o'clock" happens three times. But significant time, possessed of the biblical quality of decisiveness, cannot be changed, and therefore cannot be repeated.

Nor are days and years decisive units of time. Until the end of the world one day and one year will be followed by another. These "times" too are merely repetitious, and can also be tampered with and changed. They are in man's hands. The adjustment of days and years that produces our "leap year" is evidence that days and years can be manipulated by the hands of men. In the thought of the Bible, the significant times are the "times and seasons which the Father has set within His own authority" (Acts 1:7). A truly significant answer to the question, "What time is it?" demands that the eye be turned not to the clock or calendar, but to Christ. For according to the Bible, it is impossible to tell time significantly without looking at Christ!

## Christ, The Divider

**T**o tell time is to divide time. The elder, who informed the minister that it was "ten o'clock," by means of his watch separated that point of time from all other times "before" or "after" ten o'clock. But such a division of time is not really decisive; it does not really divide time. The clock divides one hour, one minute from another, yet not decisively. This is clear from the fact that hours and minutes are *interchangeable*; we can make ten o'clock, nine o'clock, as in the case of Daylight Saving Time. The indecisive character of time as divided by the clock is clear from the fact that twelve hours after "ten o'clock," it is ten o'clock again.

On the clock, one hour does not differ from another; on the calendar, one day does not differ from the next. It is this fact that allows for their repetition. And it is this quality of repetitious sameness that leads many people to despair and suicide. It prompted that cynical word of Shakespeare: "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, creeps its petty pace from day to day."

Neither the clock nor the calendar can truly divide time. In consequence neither can discriminate between times and tell us what time it is.

Christ alone can truly divide the time. He alone can separate the present from the past and the future, in such a manner that the past is truly past, the present decisive, and the future sure. Without such a division of time, no one can significantly answer the question, "What time is it?"

With the cleavage that Christ has wrought in time, the "old" becomes truly old and the "new" truly new. For this reason the Gospel is news, and its glad tidings ever timely! Christ alone divides the time so that the Old Testament and the Old Covenant are truly old, and the New Testament and the New Covenant truly new. It is He, not the clock or calendar, that introduces the Great Divide, the real distinction between this age and the former age, between "his hour," and "the hour of the prince of darkness."

Only they who discern this Great Division wrought by Christ can tell the "time of their visitation," the times that God has set in His own hands. Only they can tell what time it is, who look at Christ! When Christ through his division of time is not recognized as Lord over time, time itself becomes a tyrant; and men its victims.

Most people, of course, would not agree that Christ is the only significant "Time-piece." The unbeliever would greet the assertion that he cannot tell time because he rejects Christ, as an arrogant and intolerable Christian presumption. The secular scientist would view the Christian affirmation that it is necessary to be Christ-conscious in order to be significantly time-conscious as a religious curio. The division of history by both secular and Christian historians into Ancient, Medieval, and Modern periods shows plainly that the accepted principle of dividing time rests on secular-scientific considerations and not on biblical ones. In the Bible, on the basis of Jesus Christ, time is divided between the Old and the New Testaments. The blank pages between the biblical Testaments, as it were, symbolize the Great Divide that separates the times. Since the academic division of history into "Ancient," Medieval," and "Modern" rests upon the selection of historical events that allegedly demand these divisions, the disregard of the Christ-wrought division of the times cannot be regard-

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ed by the Christian as a mere methodological technique.

The refusal of academic historians to grant free play to the theological significance of B.C. and A.D. is a refusal to recognize the decisive significance of the Christ-event for the task of rightly dividing the meaning of history. This disregard of the theological significance of B.C. and A.D. hides the inner meaning of history from academic historians and predetermines their interpretation of history as secular. For a Christian understanding of history, B.C. and A.D. represent the basic division, and every other division imposed upon history must be qualified by this decisive decision. This is elemental for a Christian philosophy of history.

Like the ancient Jews, modern secular historians do not know the "time of their visitation."

**F**AILURE to understand the theological truth that Christ divides the times and thereby declares His Lordship over time, has its dire consequences not only in academic but in the practical spheres of life as well. Not knowing the Lordship of Christ revealed in His division of time, modern man falls victim to the lordship of time itself.



The man of the western world is harried by time, a victim of the tyranny of clock and calendar. Time becomes his lord, and he is its victim. Knowing no time except that of clock and calendar, he is dominated by quantity and numbers, by the biggest and the most. Fighting against time, he frantically squeezes out of each moment as much "eat, drink, and be merry" as possible — for tomorrow we die.

Even Christians do not escape this scourge-like quality of clock time. Professing to have eternal life, they are always in a hurry! Few contemporary Christians could think themselves into the mood of Job's three friends, who sat for seven days looking at Job in silence! Thought about time which allows the clock and calendar to tyrannize our lives is hardly consonant with the biblical idea of time. The slavish hurry and scurry, the fear and tension such mechanical conceptions of time generate, is a natural concomitant of a machine-age and a materialistic, technological culture, but it is hardly consonant with the biblical idea that the Christian, through Christ, is lord over time!

## The Bible's View of Time

IN contrast with modern thought, the Bible has only secondary interest in time as computed by days and years. The Bible, for example, does not present sufficient data to compute the age of the world with even approximate accuracy. The popular notion of the world as 6,000 years old, based on Ussher's chronology, has long been rejected by even conservative scholarship. Conservative biblical scholarship frequently sets the world's age at either indeterminate or relatively high figures. Bavinck and Kuyper regarded the first three days of creation as "days" of undetermined length. Dr. John DeVries, in *Beyond the Atom*, ventures the inorganic world's age as a possible two billion years, and the age of the race as about ten thousand years.

The genealogy of Matthew also demonstrates that the biblical interest in days and years is in a minor key. Matthew's historical survey of the Old Testament is presented in terms of men, not in terms of years. Although deeply interested in the "fullness of time," his short genealogical survey of Old

Testament history contains no dates. The three groupings of fourteen names each, are from the viewpoint of chronology, mechanical and manipulated. Even the "men" are so listed that a single "begat" includes more than a single generation, rendering the attempt to multiply "men" by an "average lifespan" to arrive at the age of the Old Testament, impossible. Scientific historical scholarship would regard such historical writing as a tampering with the clock—and intolerable in the sphere of history.

Thus the western mind artificially separates its philosophy of time from its philosophy of history. The two are held apart, as though history can be understood apart from time, and time apart from history!

Similar evidence of the Bible's secondary interest in mere days and years is seen in its loose use of round numbers, for example, "forty years." Even the exact date of the birth of its central figure cannot be determined on the basis of the biblical evidence. Matthew, who was profoundly interested in the "fullness of time," does not enable us to discover the exact year of Christ's birth! Modern historical scholarship, with its typically western understanding of time regards this as defective historical recording.

More positive evidence of the biblical disinterest in that chronological precision so cherished by western minds, is the loose use, from its point of view, of such designations as the "day of the Lord," and the "year of the Lord." Similarly, the Bible's designation of its own time, almost two thousand years ago, as the "last days," and its designation of its generation as that upon which the "ends of the ages have come," sounds strange to western minds.

The attempt to interpret the Bible's view of time in terms of our conception of time, has led many people to regard the Bible's pronouncements about time as plainly erroneous. Failure to under-

stand the Bible on the basis of its own conception of time, has led liberal theology to claim that Paul, and even Jesus Himself, were mistaken about the time of the Second Coming and the end of the world. The same failure has frequently misled conservative scholarship to view the Second Coming of Christ in terms of the "end of the world," instead of in terms of Christ's Resurrection. Whenever the Second Coming has been understood in terms of an undetermined future *date*, the New Testament sense of the nearness of Christ's return has been lost.

Both liberal and conservative biblical scholarship has frequently been guilty of reading its conception of time into the Bible, instead of interpreting the Bible on its own view of time. Whenever this has happened, the Bible has taken its vengeance by refusing to disclose its secret. The theological task is, therefore, to interpret the Bible—and our own times—in the light of its own conception of time. Unless this is done, it is impossible to give a significant answer to the question, "What time is it?" For in the biblical idea of time, Christ is the Timepiece.

On the other hand, it is deeply and strangely significant that the western world, in spite of its mechanical conception of clock-calendar time, by its method of counting years in terms of B.C. and A.D., unconsciously confesses that Jesus Christ divides the times and is, therefore, the point of reference for all time. This is theologically significant. For at the basis of the accepted method of counting time backward and forward from Christ, lies deep theological truth! A.D. and B.C. rests upon a theological truth which, if taken seriously, would alter the whole viewpoint of the modern world.

Next time, attention will be focused upon this significant element of Christian theology concealed in the method of reckoning years in terms of A.D. and B.C.

By whom has truth ever been discovered without God?  
By whom has God ever been found without Christ? By whom  
has Christ ever been explored without the Holy Spirit? By  
whom has the Holy Spirit ever been attained without the mysterious gift of faith? —*Tertullian* (AD 145-220)



# The Christian Reformed Church and the Problem of Divorce

by GEORGE STOE

THIS survey is concerned with only a restricted, narrow phase of the divorce problem.

The problem to be discussed here is simply *legal, church-jurisdictional*.

The question is: How does the divorced and the subsequently remarried person stand with reference to the law and judgment of the Church? More particularly, the question is: May a divorced and remarried person, while still divorced or remarried, be a member of the Church of Christ? If so, on what conditions? If not, what is required for reinstatement of membership?

The problem of divorce and remarriage is quite a bit bigger than this. The problem is *social, moral, spiritual*. It is one of urgent concern for the adjustment or readjustment of broken lives and broken homes. It is one of urgent concern for rectification of the spirit and manner of individual and social living. And it is one of urgent concern for the relationship of the sinning soul to Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord. On this score it is a problem of terrific challenge to the Church, to which is given the saving and healing ministry of the gospel.

I merely refer to this bigger problem here—and in quite general terms. I do not stop to reflect upon it or upon our Church's address to it. This I hope to do later.

At this point I survey our problem of divorce and remarriage as a *legal, church-jurisdictional* problem. As such it does, indeed, have *social and moral and spiritual* implications. But it is important to note that the specific approach and the prior concern here is with the *legal, church-jurisdictional* aspect of the problem.

It is in this form that the problem has long been before our Synod. And it is in this form that the Synod of 1951 has placed the problem before the Church, asking for discussion of it in the hope that "we may by this means arrive at a *communis opinio* (common judgment) on this important matter."

The decision of the Synod of 1951 is in answer to a protest registered in 1948 by Mr. Peter L. Van Dyken of

Ripon, California, against the position of the Church on divorce and remarriage. The Committee appointed in 1948 for the study of this protest and the problem it sets forth, presented a divided report and recommendation to the Synod of 1951. Thereupon the Synod of 1951 adopted the following recommendation of its Advisory Committee:

*That Synod take no action on either the majority or minority report, but commend them together with all relevant materials to the churches for study, and refer decision on the Van Dyken protest to the Synod of 1952.*

Grounds:

1. *This is consistent with the committee's desire for more study and discussion.*

2. *This is consistent with the Synodical decision that "as much as possible the rule shall be adhered to that no proposals of importance shall be presented to Synod that have not appeared in the Agenda, so that consistories and classes may have opportunity for previous deliberation."* (Acts 1904, Art. 112)

IN order to help the process of discussion and contribute some part to it, I will try to give a full summary of the Majority and Minority reports placed before the Synod of 1951, and by that Synod commended "to the churches for study." And in order to make these fine reports the more intelligible, I am giving some of the history of events and decisions which led to them, and shall endeavor to isolate and give clear statement to the crucial elements of the problem as well as the essential point or points of difference between the Majority and Minority reports.

A summary statement of the position of the Christian Reformed Church on Divorce and Remarriage will be given in this article. In a succeeding issue there will be given a summary statement of the Protest of Mr. Van Dyken, of the Majority and Minority reports of the Committee assigned to the study of that protest, and a preliminary analysis of those three documents. In still

other issues of this *Journal* there will be discussion in fuller scope of some of the phases of the problem.

The material given below is, in the nature of the case, a bit complicated. The language employed is unavoidably technical and legal. This is not for light reading. This is for study. And if you are interested in following the discussion on divorce, it is suggested that you keep for later reference the summary given below.

## The Historic Position

THE official, historic position of the Christian Reformed Church on Divorce and Remarriage up to the time of 1947 (when a modified position on some points was adopted, giving rise to the current dispute), may be summarized as follows:

### I. THE ETHICS (i.e., the right or wrong) OF DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE:

#### A. The Ethics of Divorce

1. The only Biblical ground for divorce is *adultery* (Acts 1890, p. 24). That is, the party thus sinned against may obtain a divorce—the adultery of the other party being a valid, proper ground. It is judged that adultery breaks the marriage bond, which may, however, be restored by forgiveness, reconciliation, and resumption of relations.

2. *Desertion* is not a Biblical ground for divorce. Any contrary interpretation of I Cor. 7:15 (which did prevail from 1894-1896) is rejected (Acts 1900, p. 21). Hence, a divorce obtained on grounds of desertion is judged unbiblical, and the party obtaining it is guilty of sin. What holds for desertion holds equally for "mental cruelty," "incompatibility," or any other possible "ground," other than adultery.

3. The Church has not officially expressed itself on the question as to whether there is ever an innocent party in an unbiblical divorce. It might be presumed that the party who contests such a divorce, even though unsuccessful, is innocent. There is no official judgment on that score, however; nor



has Synod ever expressed itself on the right of such an "innocent" person to remarry.

## B. *The Ethics of Remarriage*

1. The innocent party in a divorce obtained on grounds of adultery may remarry, — such remarriage is not sin. The reason, apparently, is that adultery breaks the marriage bond and sets the innocent party free (Acts 1908, p. 39).

2. The party who commits adultery, after being divorced, may not remarry. The reason: adultery frees the innocent partner, but not the guilty one. The guilty party is said to be yet "bound before God" to the innocent party who is freed from him (Acts 1908, p. 39). If the guilty party does remarry, his second marriage is a continuous living in adultery (Acts 1908), even if the innocent party has remarried, — since the guilty party is still bound to the innocent party who was freed from him and subsequently became bound to another (Acts 1944, pp. 58-60). The guilty party may remarry, however, if the innocent party dies (Acts 1908).

3. One who obtains an unBiblical divorce commits a second sin if he marries again. He may not marry again, even after the other party has married again (Acts 1904, pp. 53-55; 1908, pp. 31, 32; 1932, pp. 175, 176). If he does, the second marriage is a continuous living in adultery.

## II. MEMBERSHIP STATUS OF THOSE DIVORCED AND REMARRIED

### A. *Membership Status of Those Divorced.*

1. One divorced because he has been guilty of adultery may presumably remain a member of the Church if he confesses and repents of his sin and remains unmarried.

2. One divorced on unBiblical grounds may presumably remain a member of the Church if he confesses and repents of his sin, and either re-establishes the original marriage or else thereafter remains unmarried.

### B. *Membership Status of Those Remarried.*

1. One who marries again after being divorced because of his adultery, may not be a member of the church while his first wife is living (Acts 1890, p. 24). If remarried while his first wife is living, he can be a member only if he separates from his second wife (Minutes, Feb. 3, 1858, Art. 6; Acts 1875, Art. 35).

2. One who marries again after obtaining an unBiblical divorce may not be a member of the Church unless he separates from his second wife (Minutes, Feb. 3, 1858; Acts 1875).

3. One who was divorced on unBiblical grounds and then remarried, is, upon confession and satisfactory evidence of repentance, allowed admission to membership, on the ground that his sins of unBiblical divorce and remarriage were committed while he was in a state of unbelief and godlessness. The man is not required to separate from his second wife (Acts 1936, pp. 144, 145; cf. Acts 1912, pp. 51, 52; 1914 pp. 73-76). (This was a judgment made in a concrete case, in application of the principles of 1890 and 1908. This judgment in a concrete case was elevated to an official and governing principle in 1947, as will appear below).

## The New Position of 1947

THROUGHOUT the years there had been some expression of dissatisfaction with the rigorous stand of the church on divorce set forth in the decisions of 1890 and 1908. In 1945, apparently in response to an overture asking that Synod "repudiate and rescind" that stand, Synod appointed a Committee "to re-examine the decisions of 1890 and 1908, dealing with the Church membership of unBiblically divorced and remarried persons who come to repentance of their sins." Among the grounds given were these: that "Synod had never adopted an official exegetical position in support of its previous decisions," and that "the decisions of 1890 and 1908 are inflexible and allow of no exceptions." (Acts 1945, p. 69).

The Committee which was appointed in 1945 reported in 1947.

Implicit in the mandate given to that Committee was a two-fold charge:

1. To recommend a consistent position on divorce and remarriage less inflexible than the position embodied in the decisions of 1890 and 1908. 2/ To provide Scriptural grounds for the Church's position on divorce and remarriage (Cf. Acts 1945, p. 69).

When this Committee reported in 1947, something quite remarkable took place. The recommendations of the *Study Committee*, sustained by Scriptural evidence (the fruit of two years of labor by eight ministers and professors), was set aside. The *Advisory Com-*

*mittee* at Synod 1947 recommended a position radically different from that of the *Study Committee*, supported by a totally new body of Scriptural evidence. (This was the fruit of only a few days of labor by four ministers and four elders, none of whom were members of the *Study Committee*; although the Faculty Advisor to this Committee had been a member of the *Study Committee*).

And the Synod of 1947 adopted the recommendations of this *Advisory Committee* while setting aside those of the *Study Committee*. (I mention all this by way of statement of fact. I will elucidate and comment upon these facts in a later article).

Upon the recommendation of its *Advisory Committee*, then, the Synod of 1947 added two significant decisions to its "position on divorce and remarriage." They are points 2 and 3 of the action of Synod 1947 (Cf. Acts 1947, pp. 66-68). Since they are referred to by those numbers in the Van Dyken protest and the 1951 *Study Report* on the protest, I shall use the same numbering in giving them here. These are the significant decisions of Synod 1947:

2. *With respect to any person who has obtained an unbiblical divorce or who was divorced as a result of his own adultery, and who, being guilty of either sin, subsequently remarried, Synod declares that unless it can be proved to the satisfaction of the consistory that such a person committed these sins while living in complete ignorance of the teaching of the Word of God concerning the sinfulness of divorce and remarriage, he cannot during the life-time of his former wife (or she cannot during the life-time of her former husband) be a member of the church, unless, in addition to confessing his guilt before the consistory, he manifests his genuine repentance not only by means of a godly conduct in general but also and specifically by his return to the former marriage, if this be possible, or, if it be impossible, by means of his ceasing to live (in the ordinary marriage-relationship) with his present spouse.* (Scriptural ground adduced: Romans 7:1-3; I Cor. 7:39; Proverbs 28:13).

3. *The abrogation of the marriage-bond or cessation of marital relations shall not be demanded of those who committed the aforesaid sins while living in the state of complete ignorance of the teaching of the Word of God*



## THE PROBLEM OF DIVORCE — Continued

concerning the sinfulness of divorce and remarriage. (Grounds given are that Scripture requires different treatment for "those who have sinned without the law," as witness: Luke 12:47, 48; 23:34; Acts 3:17; Rom. 2:12; 1 Tim. 1:13; Acts 26:9; and that Scripture does not require a polygamist to reject his present wife, when converted, see: Titus 1:6; Eph. 5:7; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Cor. 12:1. Full statement of supporting evidence may be found on pp. 66-68 of the Acts of 1947).

We shall try to set forth the "new position," set forth in these rather involved sentences, in a few clear-cut propositions, and in the process take note of the "new" elements. It will be noted that these decisions touch particularly on the matter of the remarriage of divorced persons.

### A. The Ethics of Remarriage After Divorce (1947):

1. One divorced by reason of his adultery may not remarry during the life-time of the one who divorced him. Such remarriage is sin. (This repeats 1890 and 1908).

2. One divorced on grounds other than adultery may not remarry during the life-time of his former mate. Such remarriage is sin. (This repeats 1890 and 1908).

3. If in either instance above the divorced person remarries, such remarriage is an act of adultery, and the continuance of the marriage is a continuous act of adultery. (This repeats 1890 and 1908).

4. If in either instance above the person was divorced and remarried while ignorant of the teaching of the Word of God on these matters, the

second marriage is not a continuous act of adultery. This is evident from the fact that those who were before "unenlightened" do not have to discontinue the second marriage after they have confessed and repented of the sins of divorce and remarriage. That is, though the act of remarriage is an act of adultery, the maintenance of that second marriage is not continuous adultery. (This is a new element. The Synod of 1947 makes a less rigorous ethical judgment than the Synods of 1890 and 1908 did. For 1947 says that the marriage which is sinful for some, and which must therefore be forsaken before they can obtain pardon, is not sinful for others, and therefore need not be forsaken. This is 1947's ethical exception.)

### B. Membership Status of Those Remarried After Divorce (1947):

1. One who, after being divorced by reason of adultery, enters into a second marriage, may be a member of the church if he confesses and repents, and further meets any of the following conditions:

a. If he divorces his second wife and returns to the wife who first divorced him. (This was never required by any previous decision. This is the more rigorous element in 1947; although the rigor is quite abstract, since the decision adds "if this be possible," without defining either possibility or impossibility).

b. If he ceases to live in the marriage relationship with his second mate. (This is 1890, 1908).

c. If the wife who first divorced him dies. In this case discontinuance of the

second marriage is not required. (This is 1890, 1908).

2. One who, after obtaining an un-Biblical divorce, enters into a second marriage, may be a member of the church if he confesses and repents, and further meets any of the following conditions:

a. If he divorces his second wife and returns to his first wife. (The comments in 1, a, above, apply equally here.)

b. If he ceases to live in the marriage relationship with his second mate. (This is 1890, 1908).

c. If his first wife dies. In this case discontinuance of the second marriage is not required. (This is 1890, 1908).

3. If in either instance above the person was divorced and remarried while ignorant of the teaching of the Word of God on these matters, that person may be a member of the church if he confesses his sins of divorce and remarriage and gives satisfactory evidence of genuine repentance. That is all. No other conditions for church membership need to be met. That is, this person does not have to divorce his present wife and return to his first wife. He does not have to cease living in the marriage relationship with his second wife. He does not have to wait until his first wife has died. He may continue in the second marriage without prejudice to his membership in the Church. This is 1947's statutory exception.

In the next issue of the Journal we shall give a summary of and some comment upon the Van Dyken protest to the Synod of 1948, and the Majority and Minority Reports on this protest to the Synod of 1951.

## Canada's Need — Our Opportunity

by HARRY R. BOER

THE Christian Reformed Church is Canada-conscious these days. There is reason for this. Ship after ship is entering Canada's eastern harbors bringing hundreds and thousands of Dutch Reformed immigrants to a new home. Before them stretch the vast reaches of a great land and open to them are its rich resources. They are stepping into an unknown but challenging and inviting future. They are our

brethren and we cannot but be mindful of them.

They want to enter that future with God in faith. Thrice fortified is the immigrant who in the difficulties attending transition and readjustment can strengthen himself in the Lord his God. Happy and privileged are those who are in position to help them retain their hold on God and their love for his Church. Happy and privileged, there-

fore, is the Christian Reformed Church, her ministry and membership, for she can extend that aid.

We are also being called by the larger vision of service to the whole of Canada, that vigorous, developing, and increasingly significant neighbor to our north. Think of what a healthy and aggressive Reformed church may come to mean for that, in many ways, ecclesiastically characterless land. There is



need in Canada for an effective Reformed witness, and we are now in a position to provide a growing basis for such a witness.

Already we have sent some twenty ministers and a number of field workers to help the immigrants. They are getting settled in their new home, congregations are being organized, churches are being built, meetings are overflowing. The Christian Reformed Church has helped by prayer and gifts and men. But this service is, after all, our gain. The present Canadian immigration is bringing into our denominational life a new and vigorous stream of men and women who by the fact of their coming display an initiative and vitality that promises to strengthen the land and the Church they will enter.

Let us embrace the opportunity, the opportunity of a Church's life-time, to give and to receive. Let us now speak of giving. For many years to come we shall receive from those to whom we give but once. And now is the time for giving.

The Synod of 1951 authorized the Committee for Church Help to sponsor a drive for \$150,000 to aid and encourage the building of churches and parsonages for immigrant congregations in Canada. The Committee's campaign committee has swung into action and is appealing to our people and churches to go over the top.

**H**ERE are the facts. Canada needs twenty-six church buildings and

twenty-three parsonages. These are emergency needs and by no means cover the situation. A church and parsonage together cost about \$40,000. This is certainly modest judged by standards generally obtaining among us. An outlay of \$1,000,000 is therefore required. It has been the policy of the Church Help Committee to advance about \$10,000 toward a church building program. Of this amount \$7,500 is to be returned at the rate of 5% per annum beginning five years from receipt of loan. \$2,500 is an outright gift. The remaining \$30,000 will be raised directly by the congregation concerned. That is to say, the Canadian churches will receive as a gift from us only 1/16 of the cost of the building program; and the immigrants themselves will pay 15/16 of that cost.

Therefore, the campaign committee correctly points out that we are not by the extending of our help putting the immigrants on "easy street." We are simply helping them to help themselves, which is always the best way to help. The committee further points out that if this modest assistance is to be granted not \$150,000 *but* \$300,000 *will be needed*. If the \$150,000 is to be raised a minimum of seven dollars per family will have to be given. But if we are to work toward the \$300,000 mark, ten, twelve and fourteen dollars per family will have to be raised.

In 1949 the first \$150,000 drive brought in \$190,000. Today the number of immigrants coming into Canada is

larger, the need to put our shoulders to the wheel more urgent. As we live in our comfortable homes, and worship in our spacious churches in the land to which we or our fathers came as immigrants, let us remember with a warm heart and an open hand the brethren who are standing at the beginning of the long road ahead.

The campaign committee, in name of the Synod of 1951, is appealing to the denomination to effect what Synod approved. We are certain that all our people will respond with ready hearts and generous gifts to this final word of the Committee:

"Brethren in Christ, this appeal in the final analysis comes to you from our Lord and Savior, who for our sake became poor. He would lay the needs of his saints in Canada upon your sympathetic hearts. We are confident that yours will be the response: 'Lord, from the bounties thou hast given unto us we gratefully bring.' Rest assured that you will be enriched by the joys of grace from Him who loveth a cheerful giver."

We advise our church membership to contribute through local church channels. Should any of our readers be disposed to mail in an individual contribution he should send it to

Canadian Emergency Building Fund  
Campaign,  
801 Central Avenue,  
Holland, Michigan.

# *The Young Calvinists and the* **RACE QUESTION**

by HARRY R. BOER

**A**S our denomination enters upon a more intensive evangelization of the Negroes in our land a study of the Young Calvinist Race Resolutions has more than ordinary significance. The decision of Synod to expand our witness among the Negroes by the employment of a full time Negro worker to spearhead the movement, places the study in a most concrete context. In any event it is necessary to reflect on the race question as a problem with which we all as members of the American community are deeply concerned.

## The Young Calvinist Resolutions

In the September issue of *The Reformed Journal* we presented a review of the rise and the contemporary significance of the race problem. In this article we shall look more closely at the resolutions in question. They can be found on the last page of the July issue of this paper and we trust all who are interested in the problem will read them carefully. It will not be amiss, however, to summarize them here. They consist of two parts which may be called Principles and Application of Prin-

ciples. The resolutions, in summary, state:

- A. In consideration of the fact that
  1. All men are created in the image of God
  2. All races of men are of one blood being descended from our common first parents
  3. Gifts physical, intellectual and spiritual have been conferred by God on men of every race
  4. The Hamitic curse has no application to the Negro race
  5. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men without distinction and in-



## THE 'RACE QUESTION' — Continued

corporates them into the fellowship of one body

6. The Law of Love obligates us to treat all men as neighbors and to consider each better than ourselves.

B. The Federation of Young Calvinists solemnly declares that

1. There is no warrant for the indulgence of racial pride in and through discriminatory practices

2. The Christian should honor the Negro's right to free equality and should seek to initiate and support such legislative and educational programs as aim to secure for him equal rights and opportunities

3. The Negro ought no less than other groups to be the object of local missionary activity

4. Existing congregations are bound to admit Negro Christians unhesitatingly to full communion and fellowship

5. The Negro should be admitted to our Christian schools on the same terms as all others

6. The Christian should seek to foster in every reasonable way the integration of the Negro into the community's life, and measures like forced segregation should be condemned as a violation of Christian principle

7. The imposition of an unwelcome guardianship by one race upon another is not warranted

8. The Christian should in his personal dealings with the Negro live by the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The forthrightness of these resolutions will appeal to everyone who likes clear and unequivocal statements of position. The Young Calvinists have taken an unambiguous stand on an important issue, and it is there for the world to see. There is no "yes-but" in these declarations, no beautiful statement of position nullified in whole or in part by "practical" considerations. Principles and practice square. Only so do principles have meaning, only so does practice have good basis.

The first part of the resolutions may, in general, be subsumed under two major heads: the unity of the human race, and the unity of the Body of Christ. The first is a unity arising out of creation, the second a unity arising out of redemption. The fifth statement, under A, alluding to the Hamitic curse, eliminates a popular misconception (see article by Rev. C. Booms-

ma "Cursed Be — Whom?" in the August issue of *The Reformed Journal*). The sixth statement appeals to the moral law as laying upon all men the duty of living with their fellows on terms of equality and mutual esteem. That only the power of the Gospel can make such relationships real does not remove the fact that the obligation to realize them rests upon all men alike.

### Some Basic Considerations

To all of this no one will take exception. These teachings lie at the very heart of scripture. It is true that aborigines have been known to exist so low in cultural attainment and so deficient in human qualities that they seemed little better than animals. But so real was their basic human character and so powerful the restorative efficacy of the Gospel that transformations hardly imaginable have taken place. The image of God marred almost beyond recognition was restored to such beauty and holiness as to astonish even the missionaries, who saw in the fruits of their labors the power of God manifested far beyond their fondest expectations. In the lonely reaches of the Cameroons I have found a nobility of character and bearing beautiful beyond description in men who but three or five or ten years before had been devotees of utter paganism. God has not forsaken the works of his hands. The feeling, entertained at times even in Christian circles, that some classes of men are inherently inferior and incapable of rising to high cultural and spiritual attainment, is false and must be resisted and rejected.

Those who are brought from the darkness and disintegration of paganism into the family of God do indeed become members of a *family*. This the first part of the resolution emphasizes. They become brothers and sisters having a common Father who begot them through the Holy Spirit. Those who are not members of the family remain objects of missionary concern, and fall, no less than others, within the circle where "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is the rule governing all human relationships.

From these basic considerations the Young Calvinists have drawn certain basic conclusions. These conclusions found in the second part of the resolu-

tions, they have applied not only to the race problem in general but also and specifically to its manifestation in America as occasioned by the presence of the large Negro minority.

It will be well to look a moment at the history of the relationship of this minority to the white majority. The Negroes in America are, well-nigh to a man, descendants of slave forebears. Captured in droves, ruthlessly treated, sold as chattel, the slaves came to America a beaten class of men. Their lot in America depended wholly on the attitude of their white owners. These circumstances placed on them an indelible stamp of inferiority feeling which was not removed by the Emancipation Proclamation. The *status* of the American Negro changed immediately as a result of the Proclamation. His *condition* changed only gradually. He continued to regard the white man as superior and the white man continued to regard the Negro as inferior. These attitudes were for many years determinative of Negro development in America. Neither the white majority nor the Negro minority has as yet wholly outgrown them. Such revolutionary changes have taken place in the attitudes of both groups to each other, however, that the problem of Negro striving for equality must everywhere be entertained. The various factors bringing about the changed situation were briefly set forth in the September issue of this paper. The Young Calvinists now address themselves specifically to the question: What, on a Christian basis, must be the attitude of the white man to the Negro?

### Some Basic Conclusions

It would lead to far too long an article to discuss all that the resolutions say on this question. We shall select a few salient points.

In the second declaration under B. the Young Calvinists state that the Negro should have "rights and opportunities equal to those enjoyed by other members of society." By this they mean "the Negro's intrinsic right to work, buy and sell in free equality." This point must be noted. It claims for the Negro equal standing within the structure of society. Note well, within the *structure*. The race question will never be solved in terms of *personal* relationships alone. There have been fine masters who loved their slaves and were loved by them. But the one was still a



master and the other still a slave. The structure of a slave society was left unchanged. That required a deed *in law* affecting the whole of the social structure. A white employer today may love and fairly treat his Negro employee and be loved and fairly treated by him. But as long as that employee is socially unable to move across the tracks into a house of his choice, or is refused employment elsewhere because of his color, all the love and fair treatment that can be shown him will not free him from the restrictions placed upon his movements.

The Young Calvinists recognize the race problem as one that is inseparable from the structure of society. For this reason they plead in the same statement for "such legislative and educational programs" as will secure to the Negro his rights in society. Unless the whole of society acts together through organs of effective and collective expression the race problem can find no final solution. Those who never see a Negro are, in a very real sense, as deeply involved in the problem as those who live in constant contact with him. There are and always have been problems that could be solved only by society as a whole and the race problem is one of them.

Points five and six of the second part of the declaration are intimately related to the preceding. The Negro, these points state, may not on account of his color be prevented from enjoying the blessings of a Christian education in our own schools, and in every reasonable way his integration in the life of the community must be fostered. But the proof of the pudding lies in the eating. It is altogether conceivable that many white American citizens would heartily endorse a legislative program of civil rights for the Negro. But — have his children sit next to theirs in school, have him live next door to them as a neighbor? — that may be a different question. That, many feel, is pushing things a bit too far. But is not this exactly what equality for the Negro means? What can the Negro do with beautiful principles and resolutions, and even with laws, if those who make them are not willing heartily and gladly to implement them by deeds and attitudes?

### The Social Problems

**T**HE question that is always immediately raised when measures or at-

titudes involving closer association between the two races are proposed is: Would you want your daughter to marry a Negro? This question is supposed to be the unanswerable argument to keep an effective separation of the two races in force. It is assumed that the answer is an unequivocal — No! From this would follow that more than superficial association between Negro and white young people will lead to friendship, courtship, marriage; therefore, the less of association and therefore the more of segregation the better.

It is worthy of note that the Young Calvinist resolutions do not touch on this question. They do not touch on it because it is not properly a part of the race problem. It is not a part of that problem because it has nothing to do with the rights of members of one race to enjoy the same rights and privileges in the community enjoyed by members of another race. The question, Should a white man marry a Negress, is essentially a matter of judgment. No law of man may decide this question, no law of God can be appealed to. Intermarriage between Whites and Negroes involves social problems of large import, but it has fundamentally nothing to do with the question of racial equality. For this reason fear of intermarriage may never justify measures whereby the colored minority is permanently kept in a status of social, economic, religious or other kind of segregation.

Moreover, it is usually forgotten that the right to marry Whites forms no part of the Negro demand for racial equality. To live on the same street, to work in the same shop, to attend the same school and church, to buy in the same store, to eat in the same restaurant as other American citizens — that is what the Negro asks. On what basis can this be denied him? That some Negroes might want to marry Whites, or that some Whites might want to marry Negroes? I think Negroes have no more desire for intermarriage than Whites have. Even if cases of intermarriage were to arise that would be no legitimate consideration for denying the Negro his God-given rights in the community.

Another argument raised against equality is that when a Negro family moves into a community the price of real estate drops for blocks around. That this is often true cannot be denied. And not only is this often true, but in

all too many communities Negro families are found to be less careful of the appearance of their homes than white families. The Negroes themselves often look more slovenly and live more carelessly than the Whites do. This is not the chief reason for discrimination, however. The chief reason is the color bar, as is evident from the fact that the same opposition confronts a cultured Negro family moving into a white neighborhood.

What the white man forgets in viewing this problem is that it is in no small measure of *his* making. What he forgets is that *his* forebears incited African tribe against tribe to make slave raiding wars against each other, that they transported their captives like cattle in stinking shipholds to America, that of every one thousand prisoners taken in African slave raiding only three hundred survived to reach America, that in America they were for two hundred and fifty years bondmen driven by the lash, were given no rights, no opportunities for development, no incentives to a higher life, and that for decades after emancipation little was done to improve their lot. That many Negroes do not live more responsibly and cleanly than they do may be traced in larger measure than is comfortable to contemplate to the treatment they have received at the hands of the white man. The guilt of this infamy rests upon us and the fruits of it are all about us. That no greater evils have come upon us is not because we have been just but because God has been merciful. Where is the sense of our solidarity with history, where our feeling of corporate responsibility, where the sense of guilt that identifies ourselves with the sins of our forefathers? Are we now, in payment of this unreturnable debt, unwilling to undergo a measure of social readjustment? The coldness, the indifference, the haughtiness, the "I am better than thou, come not near unto me" attitude to the Negro on the part of many white Christians is a sad commentary on the seriousness with which they pray, "Forgive us our debts." Not only what I have done, but also what my fathers have done, belongs to the guilt I must confess and in my life make right.

### Afterthought

**A**s we review this question the Young Calvinist resolutions must be declared to be deficient in one impor-



## THE 'RACE QUESTION' — Continued

tant respect. The fact that the race problem in America is of the white man's making in no sense absolves the Negro from large responsibilities in helping to solve it. There is not a word in the resolutions about the mutuality involved here. The American Negro must recognize that although he is the victim of monstrous forces set in motion by white men, their unhappy results can neither be neutralized nor overcome apart from his most energetic participation. By every means at his disposal he must initiate efforts and measures that shall increasingly bring his people to a sense of solidarity with the community, a sense of civic neatness and responsibility, until at last nothing distinguishes them from the white man save only their color. And in that they can rest as contentedly as the White man can in his color.

The aspect of the race problem alluded to here is very real and I do not mean to minimize it. I have presented it in the manner in which I have because only by a recognition of our responsibility in creating it can we hope to solve it with any degree of satisfactoriness. There is no ready solution for the problem, but much will have

been gained when it is approached in a spirit of obligation to achieve a solution that shall do full justice to a segment of our population that has inherited the evil after-effects of one of the greatest injustices in history.

In reading the resolutions it must be remembered that the Young Calvinists were addressing themselves primarily to white Christians in America. If this is not kept in mind some of the statements may be misunderstood. A formulation that occurs three times in the second part of the resolutions presents an antithesis that is, strictly speaking, not correct. It is the antithesis Christian-Negro. It can be found expressed in resolutions 2, 6, and 8 under part B. "The Christian . . . should strive to honor the Negro's intrinsic right to live, work . . ."; "The Christian should foster . . . the Negro's integration in the community . . ."; "The Christian should in his personal dealings with the Negro be friendly, tolerant . . ."

Since there are Christians among Negroes as well as among Whites the contrast drawn in these statements, although plain enough in intention, will hardly stand. But let us assume that the

expression "white Christian" had been used. Would that have been better? Really, no. What should have been said is "white man" or, more inclusively, "non-Negro." The moral law to love our neighbor as ourselves applies to *all* men, not merely to Christians. It is true that only a Christian truly so called can obey the commandment out of a motivation that is acceptable to God. But the moral law has universal validity and all men without distinction will be held accountable for the manner in which they have obeyed it. It is precisely this that gives the Christian in his witness to the world so powerful a lever. God has spoken, God must be obeyed, and all men owe Him the obedience that his Word enjoins. Although an attitude to the Negro different from that professed by the Christian is to be *expected* from the non-Christian, the same attitude must be *demanded*. And it is with the demand that the Young Calvinists are concerned.

The Young Calvinist resolutions have some penetrating things to say about Negro evangelization. Because of the significance of the declarations on this score and the importance of the problem for our denomination currently we hope to devote an article to the question in a following issue.

# PRINCIPLE and PRACTICE

by HENRY STOE

A principle is a practical directive, a mandate and guide to action. Good practice, conversely, is rooted in principle, by which it is sustained and patterned. A principle that does not issue into practice is empty; a practice that does not flow from principle is blind.

This being so there ought not to be any attempt among us to set the two at odds. There ought to be nobody saying, "It's good in principle, but it won't work." If it's a good principle it will work; if it won't work it's not a good principle. Principle and practice validate each other. The test of principle is practicability; the test of practice is its accord with principle.

There seems to be contemporary need of reminding ourselves of this for issues are coming up which require its application. There has been some discussion lately about a Free University in America, that is, a Reformed Univer-

sity free of ecclesiastical control. In the backwash of such discussions one sometimes hears it said: "In principle I'm committed to the separation of Church and School, but I don't think it's practicable or prudent to separate the two." This is confusing.

Then there is the negro problem. Mr. Callender will soon begin his missionary work among the colored people of this country. When under God he has won some of them for Christ they will come and share our pews with us, join our societies, and await invitations to our homes. Someone may now arise and say: "The Christian negro is our brother and in principle entitled to every consideration that we give to whites; but we must be practical, and it is imprudent to grant negroes membership in existing congregations. They must be organized into congregations of their own." This too is confusing.

In cases like these either of two things has happened: We have either misconceived our principles or we have allowed something other than our principles to determine practice. Either our principles are no guides to action or our practice, actual or proposed, is unprincipled. And neither is good.

### Principle

THE fault may lie in our principles, or in our formulation and understanding of them.

A principle is an intellectual construction. It is fashioned in the mind. It is the product of theoretical activity. Principles are not found ready made; they are hewn out by the thinker — by the theologian, the philosopher, the scientist.

This is what gives them dignity and worth: they betoken and reflect the presence and power of intelligence.



They are proof of man's intellectual mastery of mere fact, of his ability to apprehend permanent truth and to construe and interpret experience. They are witnesses to rationality. And by means of them a man may order his life.

But the mind — in which principles are framed — is a curious thing. It has the ability not only to fashion principles, but to fashion them out of itself, and sometimes it yields to temptation and exploits this power. The result is a bastard principle that can claim no relatives on earth. Such a principle — spun out of the mind's own substance, projected from an intellect barren of practical wisdom, excogitated in the blue, and parading as an eternal apriori — such a principle is hollow, empty, abstract. Such a principle witnesses not to intelligence but to intellectualism, not to reason but to rationalism, not to knowledge but to cant; and it is unable to give direction to life.

If our principles are of this latter sort we may be excused from practicing them. Indeed we have no alternative; we cannot practice them for they are impracticable. But then we must cease paying them lip-service too. We must cease calling them right, or good, or true. We must call them what they are: mental fictions. And we must repudiate them. To a man who peddles them we must make no pious concessions in deference to the supposed sanctity of principle. We must say to him: "I don't care a fig for your principle; it won't work." And we must do this because we don't want anyone to commit himself to a principle that cannot determine conduct. There is no surer way of stultifying and falsifying practice than by orienting it to barren abstractions. We must demand of every principle that it be creatively oriented to actual living.

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**T**HERE is another feature of principle that is worth noting: its permanence and universality. A principle has a stability, a fixity, a permanence that sets it above the ever changing processes of life and beyond the flux and flow of practice. And a principle is general. It is superior to the individuality, the contingency, the uniqueness of the particular event; it does not exhaust itself in any fragment of reality.

This is the virtue of principles. Being "timeless" they are applicable to all times; being permanent they can be ap-

pealed to again and again. Likewise, because they are universal and thus lifted above any particular circumstance, they are fitted to deal with every circumstance. One can return to them recurrently and seek guidance for every situation.

But this permanence and universality is also a source of difficulty. Resting in relative immobility above the shifting scenes of history a principle can readily get out of touch with the moving present. Calculated to apply in general to all situations, it is in constant danger of becoming without relevance to any. A principle, that is, hardens easily into a purely formal truth.

The reference here, of course, is to a genuine principle, not to a spurious one of the rationalistic sort. A genuine principle is not spun out of a man's head but is fashioned by the mind out of data provided by revelation — by special revelation, and by general revelation illumined by the special. But also; it is fashioned in time for the times. That is, it is fashioned in a particular year or epoch by a particular person or community with specific reference to a particular complex of problems and concerns. It is this specific reference that enables it in its time to interpret and direct the practical affairs of men.

But times change, and with the changing times the principle loses the sharp edge of its practical reference. If it is a genuine principle it will never lose its essential truth; it will remain permanently and universally true. But it will, if nothing is done, lose its creative import and become merely formal. It will do this because there is that in any principle which is historically conditioned and thus subject to the ravages of time.

To keep a principle fresh and timely, to preserve its relevance and power, we must be constantly working on it. We must be forever enriching it with the accumulating wisdom of practical experience, altering it to fit the dimensions of our expanding intelligence. And we must be always refocussing it in order to make it impinge with maximum sharpness on the concrete problems of the day.

If we don't do that, if we treat it as literally timeless, if we worshipfully conserve it in some ivory tower, if we carefully insulate it against every alteration, then indeed we won't kill it — its truth is imperishable — but we will

effectually prevent it from fructifying life and regulating practice.

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**I**T may be that this is what we are doing. It may be that we are misconceiving and ill-treating our principles. It may be that this accounts for a man's getting up and saying: "The principle is alright in theory, but it is no good in practice." The remark can plausibly be thus accounted for. "The principle is alright in theory," the man says. This is his curtsy to the imperishable truth embodied in the principle. "But it's no good in practice," he adds. This is his recognition of the fact that the truth has been allowed to grow formal and sterile. This is his assertion of our theoretic failure.

Now it is just possible that the disparity between theory and practice in the church-school question is owing to a theoretic failure. It may be that the principle of sphere sovereignty, in terms of which the question is usually discussed, is an ill-conceived principle. Perhaps not enough of practical judgment has entered into its construction. Perhaps its true implications have not been clearly enough discerned. Perhaps it is not properly focussed. Perhaps it is suited only to a bygone day. Perhaps it is superseded by some other principle that takes precedence over it. If so, let this be said. If so, let the vacuity, the abstractness, the limitations of the principle be clearly stated. But let us not do the other: Let us not give the principle our hearty endorsement and then be deterred by real or imagined practical difficulties from shaping practice by it.

And so likewise with the negro question. It is possible that the principles enunciated by the Young Calvinists in their race resolutions are merely formal and abstract. Maybe they were framed in naive ignorance of the various explosive tensions within modern society. Perhaps they are disoriented to the actual. Maybe they are "idealistic" and "romantic." If so, let this be said, and shown. We don't want a romantic principle. We don't want a principle that because of its other-worldly impracticability tempts a man into secular expediency. But if it is not so, if nothing can be alleged against these principles, then let us by all means have the courage and obedience to take the practical steps they dictate.



## PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE — Continued

### Practice

It is quite possible, of course, that it is precisely this courage and obedience that is wanting. It is possible that the disparity between theory and practice among us is owing not so much to a defect in our principles as to a defect in our practice. Perhaps it is not so much our intelligence that is at fault as it is our will.

The principle we profess may be pointed enough, its practical thrust sharp enough, our apprehension of its concrete implications clear enough; but our accustomed ways, our accumulated prejudices, our personal convenience, our vested interest, and our individual hopes and fears may stand the principle off. If and when this is the case it becomes clear that what we really desire is not, as the discussion above supposed, an incisive and consequential principle piercing through to the heart and marrow of practice, but a safe and pleasant principle, comfortably formal and abstract, fit indeed to be admired from afar, but not calculated to interfere with the dynamics of practical action. It becomes apparent then that what we really desire is not a genuine principle, but a policy. Our choice is for expediency and a calculating prudence.

If one wishes one can make a fair case for this choice. All one needs to do is take the "man of principle," caricature him just enough to falsify him without making him implausible, and the job is done.

One can allege, for example, that the man of principle is rigid, inflexible. He lives by a fixed theory. He acts by law and prescript. He goes by the book. And life, it may be pointed out, defies the book. To cope with it one must frequently discard the Rule and go by a judgment tutored by experience. Success is attained not by unbending adherence to static formulae, but by fluid adaptation to the exigencies of circumstance.

Or one can allege that the man of principle is intolerant, censorious. He has no sympathy for compromise, adjustment, concession; and he is coldly critical of those who make them. He does not see that to live is to give and take, to bargain, to yield and maneuver, to settle for the practically attainable when the ideal is out of reach.

Or one can allege that the man of principle is revolutionary, destructive, anarchic. He has no respect for the delicate system of checks and balances that practical wisdom has contrived. He wants to raze all the existing structures and put Utopia in their place. He wants to establish heaven on earth. He is an impractical idealist.

Or, finally, one can point to the impatience, the precipitous haste of the man of principle. Preoccupied with fixed and immutable principles, he has no appreciation of the laws of growth and development. He doesn't realize that in practice one must abide his time, that reform requires preparation and maturation. He forgets that you cannot change things over night. He doesn't understand that one must be content for long periods of time with something less than the best.

WHATEVER of truth there is in this apology is vitiated by the false perspective in which it is embraced. There is nothing in the apology that even remotely justifies the divorce of practice from principle. To live by principle is practical. If one has taken care that his principle is real, that it is freighted with the fruit of experience and focused sharply upon the actual, one is under no necessity of becoming either inflexible, censorious, anarchic, or precipitous in action.

In practice it is not rigor that characterizes the true man of principle, but stability; not intolerance, but concern; not anarchism, but creativity; not impatience, but a live sense of the urgency of duty. He is a man who, though he does not live by prescription, has given a single direction to his life; who, though not censorious, wants the

bright light of the ideal to be forever revealing the inadequacies of the actual; who, though not anarchic, considers no merely human institution or practice sacrosanct or inviolable; who, though not precipitous, believes that it is never too early to initiate improvement. And, as concerns that last, while he recognizes that the laws of growth and development are there to be reckoned with, he also knows that it is not these laws but the flaming heart and the resolute will of a dedicated people that determines what can or cannot be accomplished in human affairs.

Principles and practice must stay together. Let us have done both with impracticable theories and with unprincipled practice. Let us not be satisfied with either intellectual abstractions or with practical expedients. Let us not yield either to rationalism or to pragmatism. Let us be Calvinists. Let us insist on principles, but be ready at the same time to allow an expanding experience to enrich and sharpen them. Let us be practical and realistic, but persuaded that to ignore or to violate principle is to resist the ordinances of God. That is frustrating. And it is impious.

To get our principles straight requires intelligence, study, reflection. It requires the most rigorous intellectual discipline we can impose. To put our practice in order requires dedication, courage, purposiveness. It requires daring and venturesomeness. It requires humility and obedience.

While life lasts there will be difficulties and hazards, but it is not by blindness nor by fear that we shall overcome them. There is under God only one way to disarm them: by the uncalculating dedication to vital principle.

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty . . . It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me. But I remember the time very well when I seemed to be convinced, and fully satisfied, as to this sovereignty of God . . . And there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, with respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this . . . I have often since had not only a conviction, but a delightful conviction. The doctrine has very often appeared exceedingly pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. —Jonathan Edwards



# Christian Education and Christian Textbooks

by W. HARRY JELLEMA

WHAT makes modern culture modern?

The answer seems obvious to many. Steam and the industrial revolution; inventions and discoveries; capitalism; wholly new methods of transportation; the rise of independent nations; a complex system of international exchange and credit; decrease in infant mortality; wars on a world scale; widespread literacy; growth of democracy; indispensability of laboratories to education; translation of the Bible into the languages of the people; development of psychology into an independent science; general belief that the earth revolves about the sun; toleration in matters religious; — where is the end? Such facts without number, and understood as somehow produced by the mere passage of time, are often thought to sum up the meaning of modernity.

But such facts are what they are, and modern culture is what it is, not simply because of time's progress. Dominatingly expressing itself in all such facts, though not identifiable simply with any, is *modern mind*. What makes modern culture *modern* is not merely chronological change; effective in its creation is the faith and perspective of men. Modernity is a matter not only of time, but of the predominant religious faith of modern mind. Modern culture as modern is a mixture of time and of a patterning religious faith which is the essential dynamic of modern mind. And this predominant faith is antithetical to Christianity.

## Read the Large Letters!

THERE is, therefore, solid justification for the Christian warning against the danger of traffic with modern culture. The history of Liberal or Modernistic Christianity writes this warning in large letters. Liberal Christianity arose when Christians in their traffic with and study of modern culture became so enamored of the modern mind that they subjected and surrendered everything to it, including themselves and their Christian beliefs. Christian faith and its classic pronouncements in symbols and theology, the Bible and its claims, the very possibility of a self-revealing God, of in-

carnation, of atonement, of resurrection, of a second coming of our Lord, of church, of miracle, — everything had to be passed through the sieve of modern mind. Whatever of historic Christian belief and implications got through the sieve was considered acceptable; whatever did not was rejected, and was declared to be at best unessential to Christianity, and without authority. The loss of Christian faith was inevitable. For in accepting the presuppositions that constitute modern mind, the Liberal or Modernist had already surrendered Christian faith; had indeed already substituted for Christianity another religion, the religion which is the dynamic of modern mind.

Liberal Protestantism's progress writes in large letters the danger of traffic with what is outside Bible and immediately Christian experience; writes large the danger which lurks in the study of modern culture by a community that professes Christianity. Against the danger, in such traffic or study, of yielding oneself and one's faith to modern mind, the history of Modernism warns in letters so large that any Christian whose faith is precious to him should be able to read, however undeveloped his vision.

The concrete application to education is clear. Against the danger signalized by the history of Modernism every Christian educational institution should always be vigorously on guard. It must be the more on guard because of its very nature as educational institution. Because its work cannot be done without study, including the study of modern culture, it is exposed to the danger to which the Liberal succumbs.

## Read the Small Letters, Too!

BUT to have heeded the warning writ in large letters, and to be alert to overt Modernistic or Liberalistic theology and to a few of its cognate social and scientific theses, is not to have escaped the danger of succumbing to modern mind and the false religion it expresses.

Typical evangelical Protestantism in America today is content to read the large letters only. Explicit rejection of the Bible as infallible revelation and of the cardinal truths of the Christian

faith, outright denial of the doctrine of creation or of the virgin birth, espousal of communism or of higher criticism, — these are the large letters it reads. But the modern mind implicit in them, and which as religious commitment has predominantly patterned all of modern culture, it cannot read.

Because it cannot discern the modern mind it can reject Higher Criticism in theology, for example, and never recognize it in education. That is to say, while believing and professing Christianity in matters soteriological, it can unwittingly surrender to modern mind in all else. Even its interpretation of Christian faith, of salvation, of church, of Christian conduct, of the significance of Christian doctrine and tradition, tends to become patterned more and more by modern mind. Militantly rejecting overt statements that conflict with Christianity, it is unconsciously conditioned by the presupposition of the modern mind which it devoutly fights.

And thus the history of typical evangelical Protestantism also, though in the same small letters that it could not itself read, writes a warning against the danger to Christian faith and life that lurks in modern culture.

It would seem that concrete application to education is not far to seek. And yet many a Protestant who is valiant in Christianity's fight against Modernism misses it. He goes on supposing that it is possible to teach piety and devoutness and Christian faith while at the same time in all else that is taught accepting the presuppositions of the modern mind and its religion. He credulously accepts the premises of modern psychology, the scale of values of modern man, the modern emphasis on "practicality," the modern notions of what constitutes evidence and proof, the modern equation of Renaissance and Reformation, the modern man's ideas about authority, his definition of mind and reason, his presuppositions about property, democracy, leisure, sports, the meaning of work. He uncritically takes over a contemporary pedagogy patterned by modern mind, a pedagogy that disparages tradition, memorizing, drill, and that professes to accept and inculcate no authority but that of what it



## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND TEXTBOOKS—Cont.

calls science. He permits modern mind to dictate the curriculum, the work of the principal, the standards for admission and for graduation of students, the task of the school in relation to that of home and church, the nature and function of the textbook, the significance of athletics, the status of the teacher in the schoolroom and in society; indeed, he permits the modern mind to dictate the concrete (not necessarily the abstractly alleged) aims of education, its subject matter, and its method, provided only that there be no overt manifestations of Modernism, and that room be made for Bible and worship. And all this is equivalent to permitting modern mind and the religion predominant in it to take over the classroom, while Christianity is reduced to a kind of attendant chaplain.

Failing to discern the modern mind and its implicit religion, unable to read the smaller print and its application to education, the typical evangelical Protestant sees no impropriety in sending his children to the public school, and sees nothing but provincialism in our insistence on separate educational institutions.

A little reflection and self examination may melt away much of our impatience with him. For it takes developed Christian mind to discern modern mind. Such developed Christian mind we might fairly be presumed to possess, since our Christian educational institutions are intended to produce it; and yet we are often equally unable to read small print.

### Read With Christian Mind!

OUR forefathers organized our Christian educational system in the conviction that Christian believers were called, were under obligation, to develop mature Christian mind. Such development, they knew, is not a purely intellectual matter, nor is the mind so produced contentless and abstract intellect. Faith in God and unshakeable conviction of the infallibility of His Word, childlike confidence in the simple gospel, readiness always to subject himself and his whole world to God, but to a God who can never yield His sceptre, — such is the starting point and the constant dynamic of the Christian mind.

The development of Christian mind our forefathers knew as an obligation, — the obligation of the saved community to live a life of gratitude. And they knew also that the development of Christian mind was necessary as a safeguard against the danger lurking in traffic with culture. They knew that for real defense against Modernism the Christian community should be trained to discern the mind implicit in Modernism. They knew also that an evangelical Protestantism which does not discern the modern mind is both taking its Christian obligation too lightly and endangering the faith delivered to it. They knew that to be able rightly to read the large letters, the Christian community must also learn to read the small.

### Christian Mind and Textbooks

ENOUGH context, I think, to make the following brief statements of application to the question of Christian textbooks not unintelligible.

(1) Involved in the question of textbooks is the question of the concrete meaning of Christian education. I am not suggesting that before we write textbooks we must have some book on formal philosophy of Christian education. I mean only that the books we write should give indication of our ability to read small print, our ability to discern the *mind* that is antithetical to Christianity. We must be able to discern not simply gross and overt statements, nor simply atmosphere, but *mind*. And I should suppose also that such books would give indication of the intention to develop Christian mind in the process of discerning its antithesis.

(2) There would be little point in spending time on textbooks for courses which should not occupy a place on our curriculum. There are courses that have no place on our curriculum, despite the fact that they are found generally in contemporary schools.

(3) And just as modern mind has not been without influence on the curriculum, so it has influenced us on our appraisal of tradition — not only religious and theological and ecclesiastical tradition, but all tradition. And it has also influenced us in our appraisal of the classic or master texts. For the development of our Christian mind, proper introduction to these, and at the proper level, is of great value. We can't of course write them; but we can properly evaluate them.

(4) If we do not believe that the Christian teacher is a mere reciter of textbooks, then we shall *not* write that kind of textbook that usurps his place on the log; the kind of book that in contemporary education is connoted by the term "textbook."

(5) But then our textbooks will consist, broadly, of what a teacher would otherwise have to dictate. They will generally be much abridged in size.

(6) And then our teachers will have to be people of devoted and developed Christian mind, and this means, so far as expressible in such terms, that a prospective teacher should have had not less than four years of straight college training, with an extra semester of "education courses."

THESE are a few statements. Because brief and because collectively making no pretense to exhaustiveness the statements may sound unnecessarily abrupt. They presuppose that when we write textbooks we are confronted by the same danger that confronts us as the Christian community, and that we should be as alert to the warning in small letters as to that writ large. What we need is the development of Christian mind. And for developing Christian mind in the younger generation we need Christian textbooks that are written because we have discerned the mind antithetical to the Christian.

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp" . . . And as he was brought forward the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, the proconsul sought to persuade him to deny Christ, saying, "Have respect to thy old age" . . . Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ"; Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" — From the Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna concerning The Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp.



# Synod and the Church

by GEORGE STOB

A few personal letters from readers of *The Reformed Journal* have raised some questions in regard to my article on "The Synod of 1951," which appeared in the July issue of this paper.

The particular concern of these letters is the judgment I seem to make about the place which Synod occupies in the life of the Church. The correspondents were under the impression that my article tended to disparage the importance and authority of Synod. I appear to them to have said in effect: "The decisions of Synod are not binding. It is up to the Church at large to take them or leave them. The Church may in her own life make such decisions as she pleases, without reference to the decisions of Synod. Synod has no authority or particular significance."

This is, indeed, quite the *opposite* of what my article really said. But if it was so read by some discerning readers, there is large likelihood that many others read it in the same way. And I must acknowledge that the fault may not be wholly theirs. There are statements in my article which, if not carefully read in the context of the whole, could leave the impression indicated above. They are statements which, clear enough in intention to the mind of the writer, should have been more explicitly qualified in order to make that intention as clear to the reader. Failure to do that was my fault. And in calling my attention to the unhappy impression left with them, these readers have done me a service. It is now for me to clarify the intention of the article cited above for other readers who may have received the same impression.

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IT so happens that in the article in question I was not thinking or speaking about the authority of Synod. That I simply assumed. That Synod is authoritative, is not a matter for debate or even discussion in our Church, nor in my mind.

My whole concern was to speak of the *meaningfulness*, the *fruitfulness* of Synod and Synodical decisions *in the life* of the Church. That ought to be the concern of all of us. Who of us wants Synod to be an annual convention of dignitaries who make great

decisions and adopt noble resolutions that stand detached in the printed pages of an orange book and never become real and concrete and living in the day to day life of the Church? The natural occasion for expressing such concern was just after Synod had finished its labors, and had concluded its sessions with a prayer to God that He would bless and make fruitful those labors.

After the Synod of 1951 came to an end, I asked myself (and many of you asked yourselves): What is this Synod going to mean for the life of the Church? What of spiritual progress, what of the faithful accomplishment of the Church's calling, is going to come out of this Synod and become a reality in the life of the Church?

The answer depends, does it not, on the response of the Church to those decisions in its day to day life. One possible answer to the above questions is the one that I gave in my former article. I repeat it here. The Synod of 1951 will mean nothing unless "its *Acta* become the acts of the living church," unless those "Synodical decisions are confirmed and made effective in the life of the church." So much depends on the Church in the fifty weeks that Synod is not in session. And if the Church, in her offices and in her membership, does not respond to and effectuate the decisions of Synod, Synod, no matter how big and momentous it was said to be, will be fruitless and without meaning in the life of the Church.

It was on that account that I said: "The formal decisions of Synod do not *in themselves* mean anything in the life of the Church." They don't. Some of those decisions lie dead and entombed in the *Synodical Acts*. There are many of our people, and perhaps ministers, who are unacquainted with and consequently are not governed by some past Synodical decisions which are still on the record and have never been rescinded. There are other decisions which are simply ignored. There are still others which are "altered, or interpreted by the will and behavior of the Church in its every day life;" and thus some churches and some church-members have become a law to themselves and sin against the solidarity and the communion of the Church.

You see, so much depends on the loyal and obedient response to Synodical decisions *in the life of the Church*. Synod is not so "big and absolute and final" after all. The Church and her ministry and membership in their every day life — that's the big thing. And there's no point in putting all of our eggs in the Synodical basket. They won't hatch and bring forth real life there. Synod — to carry on the figure — may lay the eggs. But it's up to the Church to brood over them, bring them to life, and set them to a fruitful career of service in the life of the Church.

I am afraid of Synod-worship. I fear that those who are well-meaning in exalting Synod often do Synod and the Church a disservice. There are some who attach undue weight to and place an inordinate amount of trust in Synodical decisions; almost as though the whole health of the Church is to be measured by the character and quality of Synodical decisions. But Synod is not the whole life of the Church. It is "but one moment in the large, moving life of the Church." Synod is not the final end of development in Church life. It is in large respect only the beginning, and Synod waits upon the "Church in her life and thought to . . . effectuate . . . what Synod has decided."

For example: Synod adopted some resolutions on the matter of "worldly" amusements. Does that solve or settle the problem of worldliness in our Church? Of course not! Synod's decisions, whether 1928 or 1951, are the merest beginning. The big weight falls on Synod's greater — the Church — and the problem of worldliness will be settled only when our churches and their members concur in Synod's judgments and give heed to Synod's warning.

Again: Synod decided to engage in a large mission witness in India. That is but a bare beginning. The fruitfulness of that decision waits upon the living response of the Church — waits upon the action of the Board, the willingness of men to go and labor there, the faithfulness of our people to support that work with their prayers and gifts.

This is certainly not disparaging the importance and authority of Synod, I



## SYNOD AND THE CHURCH — Continued

venture to say. This is underscoring the urgency of yielding to Synod's authority. This is suggesting the *only* way to make Synod really important and meaningful and historic. No Synod, no matter how great and illustrious, can make itself important in the life of the Church. Synod has no continuing President or Board of Executors to enforce its decisions. After Synod has acted it is without means of further action, and waits for the Church, living in the Spirit and by the grace of God, to make its decisions meaningful.

Even so great a Synod as that of Dordt in 1618-19 was without consequence in the life of the Church in the two centuries of rationalism, pietism, and liberalism that followed. Why? Because the Church and her ministry did not respond and make the faith of Dordt living and real in her life. In the 19th century, there were men who again elevated the standards of Dordt and brought that faith back into preaching and life—and since that time, *and only because that response has continued*, Dordt has become meaningful in the life of the Reformed churches.

The Synod of 1951 will be fruitless and meaningless in the life of our Church, and be entombed as dead in its own printed *Acta*, if we are content only to worship it as a "great Synod" and complacently rest in its "momentous decisions." If it is to be fruitful and meaningful, you and I shall have to live and work and sacrifice and serve in terms of the ideals and challenges of its decisions. The mere two weeks of Synod 1951 are done. The fifty-two weeks, or fifty-two years, of the life of the Church are in process. And in them rests the meaningfulness, the fruitfulness of the Synod of 1951.

**T**HERE is another thing in respect of which Synod waits upon its greater — the Church. Synod waits upon the Church not only for the fruits of its labors. It also waits for judgment upon them. I venture to say that no Synod is a hierarchy which looks for a church-full of simply compliant people, who dare not raise a question about its *ex cathedra* pronouncements. Synod is conscious of its fallibility and its proneness to err. Synod is also confident of the continuously present Word and the continuously operating Spirit in the life of the whole Church, and of

the Church's competence to discern, in her thinking and experience under the Word of God and in the Spirit of God, Synod's errors.

Synod waits for the judgment of the Church. Synod invites and even exhorts the Church to that exercise of judgment. For in her very constitution she asks for the correction of her decisions if they are "contrary to the Word of God and the Church Order" (cf. Art. 31, C. O.).

This does not mean that we must be constitutionally critical of Synod and in the spirit of either suspicion or personal pique go searching for Synodical mistakes. On the contrary, we must be constitutionally obedient, and be diligent in searching out ways to express our loyalty and obedience to Synodical decisions. The governing assumption is always that Synod is right, for Synod, too, is the Church, living under the Word and by the Spirit of God, and is ordained for the Church by the sovereign Christ.

Therefore, the primary and basic response to Synod is one of obedience, but always with an important reservation — namely, that Synod's decisions are not "contrary to the Word of God." It is in the framework of such obedience, under the Word of God, that the Church exercises judgment upon Synod. For the absolute and sovereign authority to which we are subject, and which transcends all other authority, is the authority of the Word of God. The Church of the Word judges itself by the Word, which is to say that it judges itself also in its Synodical life.

There is no warrant whatsoever, however, for the judgment of a rampant and rabid individualism. When Christ calls us to exercise judgment in the light of His Word, He gives no license to a pious anarchism. We are to judge as members of the body, with regard to the solidarity and unity of the Church, and with respect to the apostolic injunction that in the church all things shall "be done decently and in order."

We may, indeed on occasion must, take exception to Synodical decisions. But we may take exception only in such a way as to preserve the spirit of obedience to the Church, which is Christ, and in such a way as to still preserve the unity of the Church, which is the fullness of His body. The Church her-

self has in part prescribed the orderly way in which we may take exception to Synodical decisions without violating the spirit of obedience or doing despite to the unity of the Church. In other instances the Church member or group must be guided by sanctified wisdom and love.

The orderly procedure prescribed by the Church is at least three-fold: 1) The *gravamen* — a formal address to Synod on a matter of accepted doctrine in which the church member submits his grievance, and asks for the judgment of Synod, with readiness to submit to it or accept the consequences. 2) The *appeal* — taking exception to a decision of Synod which involves a judgment against an individual or a lower body, and seeking reversal. 3) The *overture* — a formal proposal to Synod directly or through lower assemblies, having reference to matters of practice or policy which concern the life of the Church as a whole.

In the case of the *gravamen* and the *appeal* there is no warrant for going beyond or outside of the formal address to Synod. This rule is inflexible in the case of the *gravamen* — no one may propagandize his doctrinal dissent either publicly or privately. It is possible that the rule is less flexible in the case of appeals, — depending on the circumstances and the character of the appeal.

The *overture* is a matter open to public discussion. In fact, any disagreement with a policy or practice in the Church is open to public discussion, — and such discussion may prepare the way for and crystallize in the overtures. But such discussion must be calculated to preserve the spirit of obedience and the spirit of unity as certainly as the prescribed procedures. Any declaration of intent to dissent in action or invitation to dissent in action, is disorderly and intolerable in the body of the Church. Overt disobedience or schismatic action is in order only when one faces the clear and convinced demand to "obey God rather than man."

The Synod of the Church waits upon the Church for the fruits of its decisions or for judgment upon them. In either case, the motive behind them both is love for the Church of Christ and for the largest and highest assembly of the Church, and the purpose is the happiest and most profitable development of the Church's life and the most faithful discharge of her calling.